



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

Senior Legal Hotline Act (S.2106) **Led by Senators Casey and Tillis**

Why do we need the Senior Legal Hotline Act?

Over half of senior households had at least one civil legal problem in the past year, according to a 2017 Legal Services Corporation report. Yet, many older adults never receive justice because they cannot access affordable legal assistance or do not know where to look for help. Low-income seniors are especially disadvantaged; these seniors received inadequate or no professional legal help for 87% of their civil legal problems in 2017. The American Bar Association's Commission on Law and Aging reports that the current level of legal assistance to low-income older adults meets less than one-quarter of the existing need.

Senior legal hotlines help meet the needs of seniors by offering free advice, legal drafting and referrals to services on a range of issues, including landlord/tenant disputes, advanced directives and financial exploitation. Hotlines are a lifeline to many seniors, yet lack of funding has caused some hotlines to reduce their hours or shut down completely, making disparities in access worse for low-income seniors. Providing dedicated resources to senior legal hotlines will help keep pace with the need for legal services as the older population continues to increase in the U.S.

What would the Senior Legal Hotline Act do?

The bipartisan Senior Legal Hotline Act authorizes the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Community Living to create a competitive grant program to support organizations that operate senior legal hotlines. Specifically, the bill:

- Requires grantees to provide appropriately trained attorneys, paralegals and other staff members to ensure effective delivery of a senior legal hotline.
- Requires grantees to establish a robust network of support and referral services so that older adults can be in contact with local resources in the aging network, other legal aid agencies and private attorneys providing pro bono legal services.
- Allows grantees to use funds to provide legal assistance using a variety of platforms in addition to telephones, such as video conferencing and e-mail.

Cosponsors: Sen. Leahy

Supporters:

American Bar Association, National Association of Senior Legal Hotlines, Connecticut Legal Services, Vermont Legal Aid, Inc., SeniorLAW Center